

An Outline Review
of
Huston Smith's
The World's Religions

(Our Great Wisdom Traditions)

Chapter X. A Final Examination

What have we gotten out of this inquiry? Has it done any good? Three answers are suggested:

A. The Relation between Religions.

This book has found nothing that privileges one tradition above the others, but that could be due to the kind of book it is: It eschews comparisons in principle. Nothing in the comparative study of religions requires that they cross the finishing line of the reader's regard in a dead heat.

There is a second position that holds that the religions are all basically alike. It is suggested that if we were to find ourselves with a single religion tomorrow, it is likely that there would be two the day after.

A third conception of the way the religions are related says that for God to be heard and understood divine revelations would have had to be couched in the idioms of its respective hearers.

B. The Wisdom Traditions. - What wisdom do they offer the world?

1. Ethics - The Decalogue pretty much tells the cross-cultural story: we should avoid murder, thieving, lying, and adultery.
2. Virtues - The wisdom traditions identify as basically three: humility, charity, and veracity.
3. Vision - The wisdom traditions' rendering of the ultimate character of things
 - a. Things are pervaded by a grand design.
 - b. Things are better than they seem.
 - c. Reality is steeped in mystery for which the human mind has no solution except to be transformed by flashes of insight into abiding light.

C. Listening.

If one of the wisdom traditions claims us, we begin by listening to it. We listen not uncritically but we listen expectantly, knowing that it houses more truth than can be encompassed in a single lifetime.

But we also listen to the faith of others, including the secularists. We listen for understanding, understanding can lead to love. But the reverse is also true, love brings understanding; the two are reciprocal.

God speaks to us in three places: in scripture, in our deepest selves, and in the voice of the stranger.
